

PRESS & GUIDE

Proposed projects include new rail station, road upgrades, hybrid vehicles

Dearborn to be a part of 'Green' initiative

By Jason Carmel Davis, Press & Guide Newspapers

January 18, 2009

DEARBORN - Dearborn Mayor Jack O'Reilly on Tuesday morning unveiled a list of nearly 60 possible projects spanning a number of areas that could create several jobs — if the city were to receive a portion of the economic stimulus package discussed by President-elect Barack Obama.

O'Reilly on Tuesday was a part of a group of three speakers who discussed the state and country's future as it relates to making an investment in clean energy. The press conference, sponsored by Environment Michigan, featured O'Reilly, Environment Michigan Environmental Associate Shelly Vinyard, who works on clean energy and water issues at the state and federal levels, and University of Michigan-Dearborn Vice Chancellor for Government Relations Ed Bagale.

Stimulus program still in infancy

O'Reilly's list included projects for programs such as Amtrak, community block development grants, energy, housing, public safety, streets/roads, transit and water. For all of the 57 projects, a total 330 jobs could come into the city. The funding required for the work totals nearly \$61.5 million.

What makes obtaining the funds difficult, O'Reilly said, is that the design for the projects has to be complete within 90 days. Also, if a project is already in a community's planned budget, the funds can't be used, either.

"Very seldom do you put money aside for a project until you can budget for it," O'Reilly said. "We had to reject several bids for (Combined Sewer Overflow) Contract 9 because they came in 60 percent over our estimates.

"Putting the money out in a certain way could cause problems. How the demand is set could drive up costs in a number of areas, so it could be a matter of timing."

O'Reilly is aware the city wouldn't receive funding for all the projects. He added the process for obtaining the funds remains in the preliminary stage.

City working on number of projects

O'Reilly said the city is working with a number of groups, including Henry Ford Community College (HFCC), on a number of energy-saving projects.

One of those projects involves the city's emergency notification system. The city is working with HFCC radio station WHFR-FM to help them gather funds for a solar-powered roof that is independent of an energy source. If those funds are obtained and the roof is put to use, in the event of a power outage throughout the city, the college's radio station would notify residents of an emergency, O'Reilly said.

The Dearborn Mayor also discussed implementing LEDs near pedestrian right of ways as a way to aid people visiting the city. LEDs (light-emitting diodes) are widely used as indicator lights on electronic devices and increasingly in higher power applications such as flashlights and area lighting.

"We have several long-term projects on the horizon that would aid the environment," O'Reilly said. "We also know that our area Congress people are on board with the projects, so we just need to make sure the people in (Washington, D.C.) are held accountable."

Report details need to lessen dependence on fossil fuels

America can reduce global warming pollution by nearly 10 percent annually, replace the power equivalent of 170 coal-fired power plants, and create or sustain more than 3 million jobs by making investment in clean energy and transportation a cornerstone of our economic recovery plan, according to a report by Environment Michigan, titled "Clean Energy, Bright Future."

"Our nation can no longer afford the toll dirty energy is exacting on our environment and economy," Environment Michigan's Vinyard said. "Clean energy can protect our environment and rev our economic engine to generate a brighter future for Michigan."

Environment Michigan's report estimates the environmental benefits of \$150 billion in investments in clean energy, such as wind and solar power, and green infrastructure, such as public transit. These investments will reduce carbon dioxide emissions, the leading cause of global warming, by 670 million tons per year when fully implemented, the report states.

"Green infrastructure means more and better jobs now, as well as less global warming pollution, fewer asthma attacks from air pollution, more clean lakes and rivers for drinking water, swimming and fishing, and more secure energy in the long term," Vinyard said.

Projects such as the green housing rehabilitation program in Dearborn, proposed by O'Reilly, and the on-site wind and solar installments on government buildings in Grand Rapids would revitalize the economy and create hundreds of jobs, while also ensuring a safe, clean environment for the future, the report reads.

"We simply need federal funding to get these projects started," Vinyard said.

Environment Michigan's proposals have the potential to meet the bulk of Obama's goal of creating or sustaining nearly 3 million jobs and will help the president-elect fulfill his promise to reduce the nation's oil dependence, according to the analysis.

Among the recommendations in the report are weatherizing U.S. homes and businesses, training workers for new, clean energy industries, and increasing public transportation capacity to meet rapidly growing demand. The complete report can be found at www.EnvironmentMichigan.org.

"We are calling on Representative John Conyers, Representative John Dingell, and the rest of the new Congress to keep it clean and pass a green recovery plan for a cleaner safer stronger America," Vinyard said.

"We know we need to become less reliable on fossil fuels and in the city of Dearborn, we're committed to doing that," O'Reilly said.

For more on this issue, see future editions of the Press & Guide.